

Post Office Trial

Reporting the Post Office Horizon scandal

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Monday, 25 May 2020

Post Office reviewing 900 prosecutions since 1999



These figures are new and off the scale. The Post Office is reviewing around 900 prosecutions since the rollout of Horizon "which may have relied on Horizon data".

From the limited information which was publicly available we knew the Post Office had prosecuted dozens of people a year from 2005 to 2013. No one outside the Post Office had any idea, until now, it had prosecuted 900 Subpostmasters and counter staff since 1999.

This is one of the single biggest developments in the entire Post Office story and I think it will lend weight to the voices of those who are demanding a full independent inquiry into this scandal.

Furthermore, I have been given information by the Post Office which reveals for the first time that there is a significant difference in the number of prosecutions and convictions of Subpostmasters in the pre and post-Horizon years.

The new information about the 900 prosecutions *appears* to have been prompted by a Freedom of Information request I made on 9 April this year (the Post Office links to it in their press statement). I asked for the total number of prosecutions by the Post Office and subsequent convictions since 1990.

My FOI request came on the back of the revelation, made to me on 3 April 2020 and published in the Daily Mail on 11 April, that the Post Office was reviewing 500 convictions on top of the 61 cases being examined by the Criminal Cases Review Commission (39 of which have already gone to the Court of Appeal).

As well as being staggered by this number, I realised it meant the information previously made public by the Post Office in response to other FOI requests was incomplete.

In August 2016, someone called Nic de Gaia asked the Post Office:

"How many subpostmasters have had charges filed against them for false accounting and inflating figures and or theft? Since 2010."

The response came on 26 September 2016:

- 2010/2011 - 31
- 2011/2012 - 38
- 2012/2013 - 42
- 2013/2014 - 2
- 2014/2015 - 0
- 2015/2016 - 1
- 2016/2017 - 0

About this blog

Hello. This now-archived website covers the Post Office Horizon scandal between 2018 and September 2021. I set up a new website: Post Office Scandal.

I have also published a book about the scandal which is available from all good outlets. It's a definitive guide "with the power of a great author" according to Dame Joan Bakewell. Ian Hislop called it "an extraordinary journalistic experience you want to buy it and be added to my se email list, please click here.

Other material I had a hand in:
Private Eye special - Justice Lost in the Post Office
BBC Radio 4 - The Great Post Office Trial
BBC Panorama - Scandal at the Post Office

Enjoy looking around. Many thanks, Nick

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I am enormously grateful to Ms/Mr de Gaia for asking for these figures. They clearly show that around the time of the Second Sight investigation into Horizon, someone, somewhere realised the Post Office might be massively over-prosecuting dozens of people every year. The above figures were used in court during the Bates v Post Office group litigation and have proved enormously valuable journalistically, but they don't tell the full story.

A month after the de Gaia FOI another request, this time from a Tony Williams, was put to the Post Office requesting: "the number of Subpostmaster suspensions, reinstatements and prosecutions between 1990 to 2010."

This is a crucial question, as it would show whether or not there was an uplift in prosecutions after the advent of Horizon. The Post Office's response, on 12 October 2016, was incomplete, and, as we will see, incorrect.

The table supplied stated the following:

Financial Year	Prosecutions	Postmasters Suspended	Postmasters Reinstated
2004/2005	4	Not Held	Not Held
2005/2006	26	Not Held	Not Held
2006/2007	37	Not Held	Not Held
2007/2008	16	190	36
2008/2009	17	229	56
2009/2010	37	214	48
2010/2011	31	193	54

The prosecution column allows us to add to M de Gaia's request and look across the total number of prosecutions of Subpostmasters from 2004/5 to 2016/7. That total is 251.

I realise 251 prosecutions over a twelve year period is a huge amount, and perhaps it should have been flagged up by people like me sooner, however the figures most journalists fixed on were the 35 cases being reviewed by the Criminal Cases Review Commission in the years between 2015 and 2019 and the 550 claimants who subsequently took the Post Office to the High Court (of whom only 74 were criminally prosecuted).

The crucial thing to note about the above figures is that they only relate to prosecutions, not convictions. Of course, any prosecution is deadly serious. It has been made quite plain to me by Sue Knight, Sarah Burgess Boyde, Nicki Arch and many other Subpostmasters that even without a conviction a criminal prosecution can completely ruin your life. And with regard to the figures above, you would assume that the majority of prosecutions would result in convictions. I have no idea what I'm making that assumption on - perhaps the idea that the CPS, or the Post Office would only prosecute on strong evidence.

This is why the figure which was given to me on 3 April is so staggering - because it related to **convictions** - "around" 500 of them since 1999.

Doing the number-crunching, if we assume every single prosecution between 2004/5 and 2016/7 - 251 - resulted in a conviction (which we know it didn't), that meant between 1999 and 2003/4 the Post Office secured the conviction of at least 249 Subpostmasters over a four year period. Wow. More than one a week.

This is either uncovering criminality on an industrial scale, or the criminalisation of a significant number of people without, as far as I can see any audit, scrutiny, independent oversight or review.

The latest revelation - currently going out on the Today programme as I write - that the Post Office is now reviewing "around" NINE HUNDRED criminal prosecutions... blows the doors off. Of course there will be guilty people among them. But if there is even one innocent soul among that 900 (and the evidence so far suggests there is a great deal more than one), the Post Office should be on its knees apologising to them and their families for the damage they have done.

The Horizon effect

Many years ago, when I was first looking at this story, a number of sensible editors would ask if I knew whether there was a significant uplift in the number of Subpostmasters prosecuted after the arrival of Horizon. Journalistically it was a key questions. If there was no uplift, then maybe Horizon wasn't the problem all the Subpostmasters were saying it was.

If there was an uplift, well... it might. Of course the Post Office would be able to explain it by saying it meant Horizon was instrumental in helping them identify the supposed criminality which was already out there, but it might also point to the start of where things started to go very wrong.

Finally, the answer to that decade-old question came on Friday.

For the first time the pre and post-Horizon prosecution figures are now public.

They look like this:

- ▶ July 2020 (3)
- ▶ June 2020 (9)
- ▼ May 2020 (9)
 - ▶ 28 May (1)
 - ▼ 25 May (1)
 - Post Office reviewing 900 proser since 1999
 - ▶ 24 May (1)
 - ▶ 18 May (1)
 - ▶ 12 May (3)
 - ▶ 04 May (2)
- ▶ April 2020 (5)
- ▶ March 2020 (7)
- ▶ February 2020 (2)
- ▶ January 2020 (1)
- ▶ 2019 (173)
- ▶ 2018 (88)

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1 4

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Replying to @nickwallis and @NFSP_UK

If I get a response from the NFSP I'll post it up here and o my blog, which you can find here:

Year	Postmaster	Assistant	Employee	Unknown	Total
Unknown	36	29	20	19	104
1991	2				2
1992					
1993	2		2		4
1994	2	2	1		5
1995		1			1
1996	3	1	2		6
1997	5	3	2		10
1998	8	7	4	1	20
1999	25	20	4	1	50
2000	25	20	12		57
2001	36	29	13		78
2002	27	20	9		56
2003	25	8	18		51
2004	18	11	7	2	38
2005	22	11	13		46
2006	35	11	5		51
2007	20	14	6		40
2008	22	15	8		45
2009	45	20	7	2	74
2010	38	11	5		54
2011	38	1	6	3	48
2012	36	5	5	1	47
2013	22	2	3		27
2014					
2015	2	1		1	4
2016					
2017					
2018					
2019					
2020					
Total	494	242	152	30	918

The answer to the question is yes, there was a significant uplift in prosecutions of Subpostmasters after the advent of Horizon. It went from an average of 3.6 Subpostmasters a year in the six years of available figures up to and including 1998 to an average of 29.8 a year in the six years after the introduction of Horizon in 1999. That is an eight-fold increase - or if you prefer it in percentage terms - 827%.

The only rational explanation for this is that the Post Office must have assumed that large numbers of its Subpostmasters were criminals, and at last, Horizon was helping catch them.

This perception that Subpostmasters are easily tempted criminals, combined with stupidity, a belief in the infallibility of computers, massively over-developed prosecutorial powers and a lack of independent scrutiny or oversight has resulted in a scandal you can now see from space.

I hope you are able to listen to The Great Post Office Trial, which starts on BBC Radio 4 today at 1.45pm and runs for ten episodes across two weeks. If you are reading this after the event, you can find all the episodes here after they have been broadcast.

This blog is entirely funded by donation. You can donate any amount through the secure payment portal I have set up for this purpose. If you contribute £20 or more you will be added to the secret email list. This alerts you to the latest developments on this story before they happen, as well as links to new articles and stories, whether posted here on this blog or elsewhere. Thank you for your support.

at [May 25, 2020](#).

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